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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001857

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/GAVITO/YERGER

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PARM](#) [SY](#) [IS](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: MARADA FAVORS EDDE OR SLEIMAN

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Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman for Reasons: Section 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Marada leader Suleiman Franjeh supports Michel Edde as president, but stresses the need to get Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun on board and to find a candidate who can safeguard Hizballah's interests. He suggests that, if a consensus is not reached, Lebanese Armed Forces Commander Michel Sleiman should head a transitional government until new parliamentary elections are held. Franjeh dismisses the possibility of a second government or opposition-initiated violence, claiming the opposition would not oppose the Siniora government as long as it kept a low profile. End summary.

¶2. (C) The Ambassador, accompanied by Pol/Econ Chief and Senior FSN Political Advisor, met with Marada leader Suleiman Franjeh at his Swiss Chalet home in Bneshay on November 21. Franjeh advisors Stephan Doueihy, Raymond J. Araygi, and Richard Haykal (AmCit) also attended the one and a half hour meeting. The Ambassador opened the meeting, his first with Franjeh in over six months, stressing full U.S. support for the French initiative to find a consensus candidate. However, it appeared that March 8 was blocking progress more than March 14. The U.S. hoped to see a president before the midnight November 23 expiration of President Lahoud's term, he said, warning there would be consequences for any party that attempted to undermine PM Siniora's government.

IF NOT EDDE, THEN SLEIMAN

¶3. (C) Franjeh, commenting that the Patriarch's list had more pro-March 14 names than pro-March 8, said the opposition would not accept a March 14 candidate or even one close to March 14. It is looking for a candidate who will reassure Hizballah, satisfy all groups in the opposition, and not pose a serious threat to the popularity of Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun. Aoun must be on board, he stressed. Otherwise, Aoun could make a deal with Hariri and leave the rest of the opposition out.

¶4. (C) Franjeh claimed the opposition would support a

consensus candidate. Michel Edde is the only feasible consensus candidate on the Patriarch's list, he argued, since he satisfied both Hizballah and the international community, was a friend to March 14, and did not pose a threat to Aoun. The Christians would not be happy with a weak Edde presidency, but the more Aoun was on board, the easier it would be. The opposition supported Edde's candidacy because it views him as being equal distance from all parties, unlike Robert Ghanem, whom most of the opposition viewed as a March 14 figure. The opposition does not want to obstruct an agreement over the presidency, Franjieh claimed; if majority leader Saad Hariri refuses Edde's candidacy, he will bear the responsibility for the failure to elect a consensus president.

15. (C) As for Aoun's own candidacy, Franjieh said he believed Aoun was convinced he has no chance to become president, and that he would not be surprised to see Aoun move towards a consensus candidate. Franjieh was working on Aoun to accept Edde, he said, asking that we not share this information with Aoun himself, but Aoun was an "extremely difficult personality." You've studied his psychology, he said; only Aoun can influence Aoun. He works on an action/reaction dynamic, and pushing him too hard on Edde could backfire. "We are more than halfway," he said, saying we should see more flexibility from Aoun in the coming days. (Note. The following day Aoun announced an initiative whereby he would nominate a non-March 8 president and the majority would nominate a non-March 14 prime minister. March 14 promptly rejected the initiative. As of November 25, we understand that Aoun is now cooking up a new initiative. End note.)

16. (C) Franjieh recognized that the March 14 majority would determine the next prime minister, but the opposition would attempt to get the maximum out of the new cabinet and would use this a leverage in negotiations over the presidency. The next government should be a national unity government, he

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said, and the president will be the referee between the two camps.

17. (C) If a consensus could not be reached, Franjieh proposed a transitional solution in the form of a national unity government whose primary goal would be to amend the electoral law and hold early parliamentary elections. Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Commander Michel Sleiman would be a good candidate to head this transitional government.

FRANJIEH PREDICTS NO SECOND GOVERNMENT,
NO VIOLENCE, AFTER PRESIDENT LAHOUD LEAVES OFFICE

18. (C) Franjieh said President Lahoud would not appoint a second cabinet before stepping down. He hinted that the opposition might work with the Siniora government (which, under the constitution, assumed presidential powers as of the midnight November 23 expiration of Lahoud's mandate) as long as it keeps a low profile and avoids taking major decisions such as appointing a new LAF commander or changing the LAF's mission statement, in which case the LAF would split.

19. (C) In response to the Ambassador's question on the possibility of armed conflict, Franjieh said Marada, like everyone else, had the right to defend itself. However, it would be in reactive mode and would not initiate anything, though he would not rule out the possibility that the opposition might support any street demonstrations that occur in protest of low wages or other related socioeconomic issues. It depends on "them," he said, warning that if March 14 decided to proceed with a half plus one vote, however, there would be a "big problem." The status quo was "easier" than a half plus one president, he said. Conflict was a "last resort," and Franjieh hoped that "they" would not push the opposition into a corner, forcing them into conflict. The opposition would then take all steps to preserve its

interests, he warned, but it was not looking for riots or violence.
FELTMAN